

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF WISCONSIN

LARON D. BRUNSON-HAYES,

Plaintiff,

v.

Case No. 24-cv-1084-pp

WILBERTO DOMENA,

Defendant.

**ORDER GRANTING PLAINTIFF'S MOTION FOR LEAVE TO PROCEED
WITHOUT PREPAYING FILING FEE (DKT. NO. 5) AND SCREENING
COMPLAINT UNDER 28 U.S.C. §1915A**

Plaintiff LaRon D. Brunson-Hayes, who incarcerated at the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility and is representing himself, filed a complaint under 42 U.S.C. §1983, alleging that the defendant violated his constitutional rights. This decision resolves the plaintiff's motion for leave to proceed without prepaying the filing fee, dkt. no. 5, and screens his complaint, dkt. no. 1.

**I. Motion for Leave to Proceed without Prepaying the Filing Fee
(Dkt. No. 5)**

The Prison Litigation Reform Act (PLRA) applies to this case because the plaintiff was incarcerated when he filed his complaint. See 28 U.S.C. §1915(h). The PLRA lets the court allow an incarcerated plaintiff to proceed with his case without prepaying the civil case filing fee. 28 U.S.C. §1915(a)(2). When funds exist, the plaintiff must pay an initial partial filing fee. 28 U.S.C. §1915(b)(1). He then must pay the balance of the \$350 filing fee over time, through deductions from his prisoner account. Id.

On August 27, 2024, the court ordered the plaintiff to pay an initial partial filing fee of \$38.23. Dkt. No. 4. The court received that fee on September 24, 2024. The court will grant the plaintiff's motion for leave to proceed without prepaying the filing fee and will require him to pay remainder of the filing fee over time in the manner explained at the end of this order.

II. Screening the Complaint

A. Federal Screening Standard

Under the PLRA, the court must screen complaints brought by incarcerated persons seeking relief from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity. 28 U.S.C. §1915A(a). The court must dismiss a complaint if the incarcerated plaintiff raises claims that are legally “frivolous or malicious,” that fail to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or that seek monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §1915A(b).

In determining whether the complaint states a claim, the court applies the same standard that it applies when considering whether to dismiss a case under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6). See Cesal v. Moats, 851 F.3d 714, 720 (7th Cir. 2017) (citing Booker-El v. Superintendent, Ind. State Prison, 668 F.3d 896, 899 (7th Cir. 2012)). To state a claim, a complaint must include “a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2). The complaint must contain enough facts, accepted as true, to “state a claim for relief that is plausible on its face.” Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (quoting Bell Atlantic Corp. v.

Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)). “A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows a court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” Id. (citing Twombly, 550 U.S. at 556).

To state a claim for relief under 42 U.S.C. §1983, a plaintiff must allege that someone deprived him of a right secured by the Constitution or the laws of the United States, and that whoever deprived him of this right was acting under the color of state law. D.S. v. E. Porter Cnty. Sch. Corp., 799 F.3d 793, 798 (7th Cir. 2015) (citing Buchanan–Moore v. County of Milwaukee, 570 F.3d 824, 827 (7th Cir. 2009)). The court construes liberally complaints filed by plaintiffs who are representing themselves and holds such complaints to a less stringent standard than pleadings drafted by lawyers. Cesal, 851 F.3d at 720 (citing Perez v. Fenoglio, 792 F.3d 768, 776 (7th Cir. 2015)).

B. The Plaintiff’s Allegations

The plaintiff alleges that on June 17, 2024, he was arguing with defendant Officer Wilberto Domena about getting some ice before “locking in” because of how hot it was on the unit. Dkt. No. 1 at 4. Domena allegedly walked to the sergeant station to tell the sergeant what was going on. Id. Sergeant Bryant, who is not a defendant, allegedly signaled the plaintiff to come to the station and on his way there, the plaintiff threw his dinner tray into the garbage and walked past Domena. Id.

The plaintiff alleges that when he got to the sergeant’s station, his back was facing Domena and he was not a threat to Domena. Id. The plaintiff

allegedly started to speak with Bryant and then Domena came from behind and pepper sprayed the plaintiff in his face. Id. The plaintiff states that an incarcerated individual yelled out, “he didn’t do nothing,” and Domena said, “you threw food on me.” Id. The plaintiff alleges that the camera clearly shows him throwing his tray into the garbage. Id. He says that after Domena assaulted him, he was taken to segregation where he spent sixteen days and was released on July 3, 2024, without a conduct report. Id.

For relief, the plaintiff seeks compensation for Domena assaulting him. Id. at 6.

C. Analysis

The Eighth Amendment’s Cruel and Unusual Punishments Clause prohibits “unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain” on prisoners. Hudson v. McMillian, 503 U.S. 1, 5 (1992). In cases involving the use of excessive force, the question is “whether force was applied in a good-faith effort to maintain or restore discipline, or maliciously and sadistically to cause harm.” Id. at 7. Factors for courts to consider in determining whether the use of force was wanton and unnecessary include “the need for an application of force, the relationship between that need and the amount of force used, the threat ‘reasonably perceived by the responsible officials,’ and ‘any efforts made to temper the severity of a forceful response.’” Id. (quoting Whitley v. Albers, 475 U.S. 312, 321 (1986)).

“The use of mace is not a per se violation of the Eighth Amendment, and it can be used in limited quantities when reasonably necessary to subdue or

maintain control over an inmate.” Musgrove v. Detella, 74 F. App’x 641, 646 (7th Cir. 2003) (citing Soto v. Dickey, 744 F.2d 1260, 1270-71 (7th Cir. 1984)). “The use of mace violates the Eighth Amendment only if it is used ‘in quantities greater than necessary or for the sole purpose of punishment or the infliction of pain.’” Id. (quoting Soto, 744 F.2d at 1270-71). The plaintiff alleges that the defendant approached him from behind and sprayed pepper spray in his face while the plaintiff was talking to the sergeant and not posing a threat. The plaintiff may proceed on an Eighth Amendment claim based on these allegations.

III. Conclusion

The court **GRANTS** the plaintiff’s motion for leave to proceed without prepaying the filing fee. Dkt. No. 5.

Under an informal service agreement between the Wisconsin Department of Justice and this court, the court will electronically transmit a copy of the complaint and this order to the Wisconsin Department of Justice for service on defendant Wilberto Domena. Under the informal service agreement, the court **ORDERS** defendant Domena to file a responsive pleading to the complaint within sixty (60) days.

The court **ORDERS** that the agency that has custody of the plaintiff must collect from his institution trust account the **\$311.77** balance of the filing fee by collecting monthly payments from the plaintiff’s prison trust account in an amount equal to 20% of the preceding month’s income credited to the plaintiff’s trust account and forwarding payments to the Clerk of Court each time the

amount in the account exceeds \$10 in accordance with 28 U.S.C. §1915(b)(2). The agency must clearly identify the payments by the case name and number. If the plaintiff transfers to another county, state or federal institution, the transferring institution must forward a copy of this order, along with the plaintiff's remaining balance, to the receiving institution.

The court will send a copy of this order to the Warden at the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility, where the plaintiff is confined.

The court **ORDERS** that the parties must not begin discovery until after the court enters a scheduling order setting deadlines for completing discovery and filing dispositive motions.

The court **ORDERS** that plaintiffs who are incarcerated at Prisoner E-Filing Program institutions¹ must submit all correspondence and case filings to institution staff, who will scan and e-mail documents to the court. Plaintiffs who are incarcerated at all other prison facilities must submit the original document for each filing to the court to the following address:

Office of the Clerk
United States District Court
Eastern District of Wisconsin
362 United States Courthouse
517 E. Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202

DO NOT MAIL ANYTHING DIRECTLY TO THE JUDGE'S CHAMBERS. It will only delay the processing of the case.

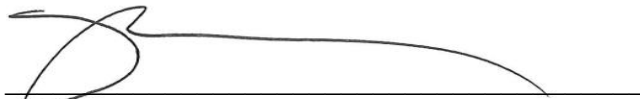
¹ The Prisoner E-Filing Program is mandatory for all individuals incarcerated at Green Bay Correctional Institution, Waupun Correctional Institution, Dodge Correctional Institution, Wisconsin Secure Program Facility, Columbia Correctional Institution, and Oshkosh Correctional Institution.

The court advises the plaintiff that if he fails to file documents or take other required actions by the deadlines the court sets, the court may dismiss the case based on his failure to diligently pursue it. The parties must notify the Clerk of Court of any change of address. The court also advises the plaintiff that it is his responsibility to promptly notify the court if he is released from custody or transferred to a different institution. The plaintiff's failure to keep the court advised of his address may result in the court dismissing this case without further notice.

The court will include a guide prepared by court staff to address common questions that arise in cases filed by prisoners. Entitled "Answers to Prisoner Litigants' Common Questions," this guide contains information that the plaintiff may find useful in prosecuting his case.

Dated in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, this 22nd day of October, 2024.

BY THE COURT:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'P. Pepper', written over a horizontal line.

HON. PAMELA PEPPER
Chief United States District Judge